





Division

Section







# Jesus of Nazareth in the Light of Today

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## *INTRODUCTION.*

*The assertion in Hebrews that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day and forever” is true of his historical character and of his ministry to the needs of men. Thru the changing centuries he has come, the unchanging Christ, scattering “the charities that soothe, and heal, and bless” at the feet of men; giving peace to the sin-troubled, purity to the defiled, overcoming power to men fighting feebly against temptation, and an absorbing purpose to aimless lives.*

*Yet the history of Christian art and theology shows that each age has,*

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*in a sense, a different Christ for its own. Each appreciates him as he ministers to its peculiar needs; each paints him as it sees him thru its own atmosphere, and interprets him in terms of its philosophy.*

*This book, like the lecture of which it is an enlargement, is an essay towards the portrait of the twentieth century Christ; an effort to show Jesus in his saving truth and power to those who may be alienated from the Christ of past generations.*

*Credit has been given wherever I have consciously used other men's thoughts, but it is impossible even to name the many writers and teachers to whom my thanks are due for help toward an appreciation of Jesus of Nazareth.*

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# Jesus of Nazareth

## In the Light of To-day

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### CHAPTER I.

#### *THE NEW POINT OF VIEW.*

Jesus of Nazareth challenged the men of his time to an opinion about him. Not only by his application of Messianic prophecies to himself and by the implied claims of his triumphal entry, but in express words he pressed upon the people the question, “Whom say ye that I am? What think ye of the Christ?” These questions his contemporaries answered from the standpoint of their age according to their knowledge of Jesus and their

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attitude toward him. The changes of nineteen centuries, however, make it impossible for us to adopt their answers without criticism or revision. Since the sixteenth century, especially, the knowledge and opinions of the western world have undergone so great changes, that the world we live in is, to our thought, very different from that in which the men of the first century lived. This change, which was most rapid in the last half of the nineteenth century, was produced chiefly by the new historical and scientific spirit and methods, and by the general acceptance of the theory of evolution. Modern historical inquiry has given new standards of historical probability and changed the world's judgment in many things as to the course of human events. The new scientific method has not only freed men's

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minds from the Medieval superstitions, but has created a new sense of God's ways in the world and new conceptions of the laws of spiritual things. These forces have profoundly influenced religious thought. Many religious opinions once unquestioned are no longer tenable by the modern mind; not so much because men have been convinced by formal argument that they are false, as that they no longer appear true from the new point of view; that they do not fit in with the world of reality as seen in the light of to-day.

It is in this light that we are led to re-examine the character and claims of Jesus. Let us face the question frankly: The twentieth century man, who is in harmony with the historical and scientific spirit, who thinks in terms of the evolutionary philosophy, who presupposes the commonly

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accepted results of the historical and literary criticism of the Bible, especially of the Gospels,—what shall he think of Jesus of Nazareth? Let us attempt to form an estimate of his character and importance as a force in history in the same spirit and by the same methods by which we would attempt to estimate the significance of any other historical personage, such as Napoleon or Hannibal, Buddha or Mohammed.

We may not avoid such an inquiry by the plea that we lack special qualifications as philosophers and critical historians. The common attitude to Jesus of Nazareth must spring from the opinions of common men and women like ourselves,—men and women who are compelled to form the opinions we live by without special qualifications, philosophical or critical. In fulfilling this duty the

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specialists in various lines of thought give us indispensable aid, but in the last analysis we cannot escape the responsibility of forming our own opinions as to the attitude we ought to take toward Jesus of Nazareth, and what place we shall give him among the forces to which we open our lives. A proper sense of the limitations of our knowledge will keep us humble and teachable; but the human mind, limited and fallible as it is, is the only knowing and thinking organ we possess, and we are under obligations to do the best we can with it. After using every means to get at the truth, we honor our Maker best by living up to what the instruments he has given us show us of truth and duty; for we must live by what appears true rather than by what seems to be false.

## CHAPTER II.

### *THE RELIGIOUS GENIUS.*

According to common classifications of men, we should call Jesus a religious genius. Religious matters were from his early youth his absorbing interest; religious perfection was the passion of his life; and the spiritual relations of men occupied him wholly as a teacher. His earliest recorded utterance shows that even before his maturity he had shown an absorbing interest in matters religious. When, on the occasion of a visit to Jerusalem at twelve years of age, Joseph and Mary, after a long search, found him at last in the tem-

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ple, he expressed surprise that their previous knowledge of his ways and interests had not led them to seek him first of all in the temple: "Why did ye seek me?" he asked, "Did ye not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Jesus urged other men to enter into a relation of perfect obedience with God, but he claimed always to have known this relation himself. He exhorted other men to repent of their sins as the only way to enter the kingdom of God, but no words of repentance ever fell from his own lips. He claimed to live in perfect unity with God. He challenged men to convict him of sin. This claim, however, is not the unique thing about him. It is not unknown for men thru religious fanaticism or insanity to claim to be sinless; but it is difficult to get those who know

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them best to allow the claim. If no man is a hero to his valet, it is because the valet sees him in those hours when he drops the heroic role. Now and then a man may persuade enthusiastic followers, who never see him except when he is made up for the character and acting the part, that he is a saint; but it is more difficult to get his wife, children and servants, who know him when he is off guard, wearied and vexed with trifles, to believe in his perfection. The marvel about Jesus is that they who knew him best are they who published his claim to sinlessness as true. It was first of all the circle of his closest disciples and immediate family,—those who saw him weary, sleepy, hungry, harassed with life's petty cares, and the victim of petty malice, who believed that he did always the things pleasing to God.

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He saw and interpreted life in terms of spiritual relations. To him the world was the Father's house. In the sunrise and the falling rain, in the springing grass, the glory of the lily and the feeding birds he saw the impartial benevolence of God. To him the whole range and process of life,—sowing and reaping, making of bread and giving of feasts, care of sheep, fishing, trading, travelling, building, and ruling,—was a parable and revelation of the spiritual laws and forces that underlie and give meaning to the visible world. At his baptism he became assured that he was the expected Messiah of the Jews, sent of God to bring deliverance to his people and to found the kingdom of God on earth. But he held that the deliverance the nation needed was not political freedom from Rome, nor military mastery

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over the Gentiles; but to be freed from sin and all selfishness; to be released from greed, bestiality, envy and cruelty; to be made kind and helpful to all men, and trustful and obedient toward God. His task he conceived to be the bringing in of a kingdom that was not outward, but the essence of which was for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

## CHAPTER III.

### *THE ORIGINALITY OF HIS METHODS.*

We have seen something of the originality of Jesus' character and point of view. They prepare us for the originality of his methods. At the outset he was confronted with temptations to take an unspiritual view of his work. Popular patriotism demanded political independence thru a successful war, and a splendid government like that of David and Solomon. It was expected that the Messiah would bring immunity from toil for daily bread. It is written in the Apocalypse of Baruch that in

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Messiah's time so great would be the fertility of Palestine's limestone hills that every vine would bear a thousand clusters, and every cluster a thousand grapes, and every grape would yield a keg of wine. The ecclesiastical leaders expected the Messiah to usher in an age of miraculous portents to satisfy the people's love of the marvelous and to give proof of his divine appointment. "Signs and bread" was the Jewish equivalent of the demand of the idle Roman populace for "bread and circuses." By feeding and amusing the populace, the "lords of the Gentiles" were enabled to keep their dominion; and if Jesus had yielded to the expectations of his people, if he had turned the stones of Palestine into bread for them, and had entertained them by such marvels as leaping from the roof of the temple into the Kedron valley

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and returning unharmed, borne up by angels, they would have been his servants. But Jesus placed no reliance on such means. Man he knew to be something other than an animal to be glutted with food, something more than a child to be amused with strange trifles. Nor was Jesus deceived by the lesson that the “kingdoms of the world” seemed to teach. Sargon and Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Alexander and Caesar had each won world-empire by the sword. To adopt their method seemed the only feasible way to win the world to himself and God. Before such a temptation to sacrifice everything for the sake of easy, immediate, visible results, Mohammed afterwards fell. After he had tried the slow method of teaching the truth as he saw it, for ten years, he gave up reliance on the power of truth and took to the

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sword. Before this temptation the Medieval Church fell, when it abandoned the attempt to convince men of the truth of its doctrines by the logic of argument and experience, and resorted to the sword and fagot to win and hold its power. But here Jesus did not fall. His originality lies in his rejection of all outward forces and his reliance on the power of truth and self-sacrificing love to win the world. But was it the originality of inspiration or the eccentricity of a madman?

## CHAPTER IV.

### *THE REALITY OF SPIRITUAL CONQUEST.*

In order to judge of the character of Jesus' originality, we must ascertain whether it be true to human nature. Modern historical study has enabled us to distinguish between military conquest and spiritual conquest. Sometimes the two go together, and in such cases it is difficult to distinguish them, but they are not identical and do not necessarily go together. The ancient Assyrians furnish an example of military unaccompanied by spiritual conquest. Their military prowess has rarely

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been surpassed. During the centuries of their power they were uniformly successful as besiegers and conquerors, but they were unable to reconcile their subjects to their dominion or win them to Assyrian ideals. Whenever an Assyrian king died, the empire dissolved into its constituent peoples, and tho for centuries each succeeding monarch was able to defeat the rebels and bring them again under the yoke, they could never assuage the hate of their subject races. They only succeeded in rendering it impotent by deporting and mixing peoples wholesale, so as to kill their national feelings and aspirations. Even then these remnants never became loyal to the Assyrian government. Contrast with this, Alexander's conquest of the Persian empire. He not only defeated the orientals in battle, but

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so enthused them with loyalty to his own ideals of a world-empire and with love of the Hellenic culture that he represented, that when his Greek troops mutinied and demanded to be led back to Greece, he was able to quell them by the aid of the Persian troops whom he had won to his ideals and inspired with loyalty to his person, after he had beaten them in battle. In this case spiritual conquest accompanied military conquest. But history tells us of military conquerors who have in turn been conquered by the spiritual forces of the defeated race. It is a commonplace of history how the Romans went to school to the Greeks after they had subdued the Hellenic states by force of arms; how they learned language, philosophy, and art, sitting at the feet of slaves and bowing to the spiritual authority of their subjects. Like-

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wise when the Germanic tribes had overthrown the Roman empire, so great was their reverence for the religion, culture, and ideals of justice of Roman civilization, that they subjected themselves to the spiritual power of Rome, binding thereto both mind and conscience for the thousand years of the Middle Age. No lesson of history is clearer than that they who take the sword and rely upon it alone, perish by the sword. The only permanent conquests are those made in the realm of the spirit by love, truth or justice; and it was by these, without the confusion and hindrances which armies always introduce into the process, that Jesus sought to conquer the world.

## CHAPTER V.

### *KINGDOMS FOUNDED ON THE UNSEEN.*

The ultimate basis of all social organizations is spiritual. Not only the kingdom of God but the kingdoms of the world are within men, resting on inward foundations. It is sometimes asserted that the ultimate appeal of government is to military or other forms of physical force. This is never true. The ultimate appeal of governments is to the loyalty of their citizens, or at least to the loyalty of the military or some other powerful section of the citizenship. A few years ago when Russia

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seemed in the midst of a revolution the crucial question finally became whether the army would remain loyal. Because the Cossacks remained true to the house of Romanoff, the Russian autocracy remains. Napoleon could conquer Europe with his legions only after he had won them by other than physical force to fight for him. If by the magnetism of his personality and the spell of his genius Napoleon could get a half-million men to follow him even to death, why should it be unthinkable that Jesus should get the world by similar means to become and remain subjects of his kingdom?

Such were the foundations Jesus laid for his kingdom, and he would not seek to augment his power, nor risk its stability by assuming the outward forms and buttresses of kingship. In a hereditary monarchy, the

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hereditary king may be lacking in kingly qualities, so that he needs the paraphernalia of royalty to hide his lack of kingly person and character, and to secure that homage and obedience which men yield to the ideal of order and justice for which the throne and scepter stand, but which his person could not inspire. But the true kingly person does not need such aids and disguises, and so Jesus sought to become king of men, without robe or crown, throne or scepter, by the sheer force of his personality, by the convincing power of his teaching and the winning power of his love. By such means would he win his kingdom and on such a basis let it rest. It was his trust in the sufficiency of these that made him seem so utterly careless of the future of his movement. He neglected the ordinary means on which men rely to

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propagate or buttress a cause. He wrote no book, accumulated no wealth, formed no government, organized no church. He came to cast fire upon the earth and needed nothing more after it had kindled. Against the world's hoary bulwarks of evil he set the blazing passion of his cross, and having seen the flame kindle in his disciples, he went his way sure that he had overcome the world. He planted his kingdom as seed and leaven in the hearts of men, confident of the vital power of its truth and love to grow and fructify in the soil of humanity, assured that it would permeate and transform the world. The power of an idea, or a resolution, or a passion to make history and to change and determine destiny is a commonplace of our thinking to-day, but with Jesus it was the daring of genius, the insight of

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inspiration. Thus we reach one measure of the greatness of Jesus, as we see how far he surpassed his contemporaries in insight, and realize how great was the faith required to adopt such a plan in the face of the world's skepticism and hostility; how daring the courage to hold it fast even in the seeming failure of the end.

## CHAPTER VI.

### *THE SURVIVAL OF THE TRUE.*

Let us now consider Jesus' teaching. It was as a teacher that he was most commonly known and it was thru his teaching mainly that he sought to accomplish his work. We may apply to his teaching the test of survival. The doctrine of the survival of the fittest means, in a general way, that the organisms, which are best fitted to meet the conditions imposed upon them by their environment, will survive and perpetuate themselves. In this way survival becomes a test of truth, in so far as

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by truth we mean conformity to the conditions under which an organism exists. There are many things, for example, that limit the possibility of growing apple-trees successfully in our country. The varieties that survive are those that are able to withstand our severe winters, dry summers, and numerous insect pests. Varieties that are not able to resist these successfully die out. Consequently the fact that a given variety of apple is successfully grown here is proof of its adjustment to these conditions. The buck's horn, to take another illustration, is a weed that thrives in the clover fields, because of its admirable fitness for life under the conditions found there. It grows about the height of the clover, and springs and seeds as quickly after mowing. Its seed is so near the color, size and weight of the clover-

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seed that it is nearly impossible to pick, screen, or blow it out. Turning to forms of human society we may apply the same principles, for forms of human society follow the laws of organic life. That form of human society, whether economic, political, or religious, will last longest and be most vigorous, which is most in accord with the deep and abiding traits of human nature and with the spiritual and moral laws of the world. That organization will be most lasting which is based on the forces that are most powerful to move and hold men. Consequently we may apply to Jesus' teaching concerning the kingdom of God the test of survival, and by this means determine whether it be true to spiritual realities.

## CHAPTER VII.

### *THE UNIVERSAL FAMILY.*

Jesus taught that in the family at its best are found the truest relations of human beings to each other,—truest to their best nature and most permanent needs; for when we examine his teaching carefully, his kingdom of God turns out to be a universal family. God stands to its members as their Father. Men are to act toward God as sons, and toward each other as brothers. The motives that rule in his kingdom are those of the family stript of its limitations of kin and blood: perfect trust and obedience toward the

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Father, and unselfish love and helpfulness toward one another; for not competition but self-denying love is the law of family life. The strong brother, if he be a true brother, shares the gains of his superior strength with the weakling; and the principle of self-denial which Jesus made fundamental in his ideal character is the basal law of parenthood.

To the family, then,—the one human institution which is in any large degree founded on the principles of Jesus' kingdom,—we may apply directly the test of survival, and thus determine in some degree, how far its relations and motives are true to human nature. We find that the family is the fundamental form of all social life and the most enduring one. Individualism is never the first condition of life. One is a member of a family first, and

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becomes a separate individual only by reason of the gifts of the family. Out of it by expansion, as in the patriarchal family and in racial nations and religions, or by covenant or conquest grow the larger organizations, such as nations, churches, and economic corporations. These organizations, founded on some other principles than those which regulate the family and hold it together, come and go on the stage of history, but the family remains fundamentally the same. Physical force, law and penalty, individual rights and freedom, or commercial interests have never proven so true to the nature and needs of man as to be able to make the institutions founded on them permanent. Nay, more! Other institutions are able to maintain themselves while they last largely by the aid of the reserve power of

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the family motives. A tottering nation seeks to support itself by appealing to its citizens' love of home, and recruits its armies in crises from those to whom patriotism means the defense of hearth and family. The church feels secure as long as its roots are in the home; as long as fathers and mothers are its recruiting agents. It makes its strongest appeals to family interests, when it exhorts a man to be religious in order to preserve the family name from disgrace; in order to be true to parents' hopes or worthy of a woman's love, or prepared to meet the loved and lost in the life beyond the grave. On the other hand, that church or nation which attacks the family with monastic ideals or communistic practices is doomed early to perish. Judged by its power to survive, the family is truest to the spiritual nature and needs of man.

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And this fact sets the seal of truth upon Jesus' teaching that the ideal and eternal form of human society will be attained in the relations of a universal family.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *THE HISTORICAL BASIS IN THE FAMILY OF ISRAEL.*

In another way we may apply the test of survival. Ideas and institutions are most likely to prove true and lasting which have a definite basis in history. Men cannot go up into the mount of speculation for something entirely new and detached from previous experience, and then bring down such a pattern and make it live and work among men. The best that can be done is to advance a step along the line of past achievements or try on a universal scale something worked out by a small

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people or in a limited field. The constitution of the United States has worked so well because the framers of it kept so closely to the principles and forms developed by the English people in their long progress toward popular government, and found practicable by the colonists in the freer conditions of life in America. It gives confidence, therefore, in the teaching of Jesus, when we find that it rests solidly upon the history and religious development of the Jewish people; that he himself consciously undertook but a larger fulfilment, not a destruction, of that which had gone before. We find that the Jews were in many senses a family nation. More than any other civilized people, unless it be the Chinese, family loyalty dominated them. Even Solomon could not obliterate their tribal distinctions in the interest of a firmer

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national organization. Their national consciousness was that they were the children of Abraham and Israel. They thought in the categories of family relations. The suburbs of Jerusalem were her "daughters." A peaceable man was a "son of peace;" a wise man, a "son of wisdom." Jewish ethics, as interpreted by their greatest teachers, the prophets, were the virtues and obligations of the family enlarged in scope; and they expressed their religion in the language of the family. Jehovah was to them the husband or father of the nation. The covenant which was the beginning of their religion was the people's betrothal to Jehovah; and their sins were unfaithfulness and adultery toward Him.

The world's master thinkers and writers are such because in them the truth, worked out in some great epoch

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of human history, has found permanent artistic expression. Thus Homer immortalized the life and spirit of the early Hellenes; Dante expressed in his Divine Comedy the dominating beliefs of the Middle Ages; Shakespeare became the poet of English Feudalism; and Milton, of the Renaissance Puritanism. Thus Goethe's Faust expresses in classic form the noble, but wild unrest of the eighteenth century. In like manner Jesus' teaching as to the kingdom of God rests upon the historic basis of Jewish life and ideals. The principles that held the Jews together he extended to include all men. Altho the Jews would not follow him into this universal fellowship; altho they could not entertain the idea of admitting the hated Gentiles to share the blessings of the family and God of Abraham, think how their limited

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adoption of the principles of family life among themselves has given permanency to their race! One would not expect to find to-day a living member of one of the nations that were neighbors to the ancient Hebrews. Where would one look to-day for an Edomite, Assyrian, or Philistine? Yet you may find on the street to-day in almost any city of the world the hooked nose and olive complexion of the pure-blooded Jew. For two thousand years the Jews have maintained their numbers and racial identity, without the asylum of a common country, deprived of the protection of a political government, exposed to the religious hate and covetous envy of their Gentile neighbors, scattered among nations that have afflicted and robbed them. If their partial realization of the relations and motives which Jesus taught

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has thus enabled them to survive, how true must these be to the nature of man, and how much more might we expect the kingdom of Jesus to be eternal!

## CHAPTER IX.

### *THE ABILITY TO CONVINCE.*

In a third way we may apply the test of survival to the teaching of Jesus. We may judge of its truth by its ability to stand the test of criticism and win the assent of men. Euclid's geometrical propositions are still held to be true, because his reasoning and his demonstrations have always convinced men that his propositions are true to the laws of thought and to the relations of objects in space. In a similar way the teaching of Jesus has secured the assent of men. This is the element of truth

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in the Roman Church's test of "universality." It is not a test that can be applied in any limited fashion. Prophets and geniuses are usually so far in advance of their age that they are but partially recognized as heralds of truth. Great thinkers and teachers have too often to appeal from the judgment of their own generation to that of generations to come. On the other hand a too limited application of the principle might seem to prove the truth of any system of belief that obtains wide acceptance, such as Mohammedanism or Medieval demonology. Yet even in such cases as these the principle holds in part, since no conception ever obtains wide acceptance among men that does not contain large elements of truth, which, rather than its limitations and errors, secure its acceptance. The real value of the test proposed

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is expressed in Abraham Lincoln's famous saying that it is impossible "to fool all the people all the time." In spite of the fact that Jesus' own generation largely rejected him, he has been able to convince men of all ages who have given his teachings candid thought and have tested it in the laboratory of spiritual experience. This is all the more wonderful since he never formulated his message into a system nor wrote it out in a treatise. He dropped his teaching in disconnected discourses among the multitudes or uttered it in fragmentary form in parables and proverbs, which were preserved only in the recollections of his disciples. Yet in this form it has stood the test of the most careful scrutiny for two thousand years; by minds both candid and hostile; by minds as diverse and keen as the Greeks, Romans, Medieval scholars-

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ties, and modern scientific scholars. Its truth and convincing power were never better shown than in the fact that to-day the cry of the world's scholarship, understanding as it does, the teaching of Jesus more thoroughly than any previous age, is "Back to Christ."

## CHAPTER X.

### *THE SATISFACTION OF PERMANENT HUMAN NEEDS.*

Let us apply still another test to the teaching of Jesus,—the satisfaction of permanent human needs. Mr. Balfour in his “Foundations of Belief” lays this down as one of the fundamental bases of belief. We believe those things to be true, he maintains, which in practical life bring us the satisfaction of our needs. In spite of theoretic difficulties we hold fast to those ideas which work in practise; and on the other hand, no theory, however plausible it may be

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from a speculative point of view, is seriously accepted as true unless those who act upon it find that it brings them into harmonious contact with reality.

The history of human thought is filled with the names of men who have won distinction by giving clear expression to some phase of truth as it appeared to their own age, but whose opinions have proven false or inadequate in the experience of succeeding ages. Others there are who have so thoroughly grasped some vital truth and given it so exact a statement that it answers for all ages. To which class does Jesus belong? There are those who assert that the unique value of Jesus' teaching passed away with the progress of the nineteenth century; that the new thought-world in which we live has out-dated him. The case is stated somewhat in these

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terms: We live in a world very different from that assumed in his teaching. We no longer regard the earth as flat nor as the central body in the universe. We have outgrown the superstitious belief in angels and devils which he shared with his Jewish contemporaries. Jewish Messianism with its cataclysmic ideas of history, its crass and artificial notions of spiritual events, its other-worldliness and supernaturalism, is a dead system of thought; yet it is the system which is presupposed in his teaching. Even the Greek philosophy in terms of which his followers first interpreted him and his message to the non-Jewish world is no longer regarded as an adequate expression of truth. A new world has dawned upon the minds of men, of which Jesus never thought, much less taught; and with this new world there

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has come a host of new problems about which he had nothing to say and in which he can give the world no help. Moreover, we are told, it is absurd to think that a peasant of ancient Judea, an unlettered man from one of the least significant provinces of the ancient world should be the ideal person, and the teacher of final truth to the twentieth century.

This view demands our careful attention. From its consideration we may, first of all, eliminate the matters of time, place, and size. Truth and character are spiritual realities and therefore not to be measured in terms of space and time, albeit we Americans are sometimes tempted to believe that bigness may make up for deficiencies of character or truth. Whether a hog existed yesterday or two thousand years ago has nothing to do with its hoggish-

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ness; nor would it change its character for it to be the size of an elephant. Nero is neither more nor less of a tyrannical character because he was tyrant of the Roman world instead of tyrant of Syracuse. The size of a country has nothing to do with the truth of a man's teaching who happens to be born in it. Greece and Holland are not much larger than Judea; yet no one has seen fit to doubt the correctness of Phidias' art nor to discount Grotius' principles of international law because these men lived in time long past or in countries so small. Señor Barbossa of Brazil, in an eloquent plea for the right of small nations to furnish judges for the world's court at the Hague, calls attention to the fact that the greatest lawgivers of the world, Moses and Solon, came from among little peoples. The greatest

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contributions to the underlying principles of our civilization have been made by four small countries and mostly in ancient times—Judea, Greece, the city of Rome, and England. The question of the truth of a man's teaching must be, then, not one of time, place, or size, but one of fact. We must ask, "Did this man tell the world the relations of things as they are? Did he show men the permanent laws and forces of life?" Some things are true in one generation, which are not true in another, because in the progress of history the facts change. A teacher who calls attention to such things is not a permanent teacher of men, except as the historian of an order that has passed away. Other things are as permanent as the universe itself, and those who discover and proclaim these permanent realities are teachers of all

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ages. To the latter class belongs Euclid. He set forth the relations of lines and points in space as they are; and until the constitution of the universe changes so that these relations are no longer as he taught them, he will remain the world's final teacher of geometry, as far as his teaching goes. To which class does Jesus belong? Did he tell the truths concerning man's relations to man and to God as they are ideally and eternally? Did he show the unchanging laws and forces of the spiritual life? Have the relations and needs of men so changed in the twentieth century that his teaching is no longer true to the facts nor satisfying to man's spiritual needs?

It must be recognized at the outset that Jesus did not give teaching about a host of problems which we find of interest. Modern philosophy

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raises the question of the existence and character of the "thing-in-itself" apart from our apprehension of it. Jesus never considered the question. None of his recorded utterances discusses problems of Old Testament criticism. He does not tell us the date of Deuteronomy, the author of Job, or whether Jonah is a history or a parable. Is a monarchy or a democracy the right form of government? What proportion of the gains of industry should go to capital and what to labor? Are the nebular hypothesis and theory of organic evolution true? Jesus does not tell us. But while he does not give answers to so many of the problems that press for solution upon the modern mind, he does, nevertheless, speak of those things that still constitute the great interests and minister to the supreme

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needs of modern life.\* If the scholar of the twentieth century may not go to him to solve problems of nature and history, he does still need to learn from him the spirit that should actuate him in his work and determine his attitude to his fellows. Too often the halls of learning resound with acrimonious debates, with selfish claims of priority of discovery, and with bitter charges of dishonest methods. Too often we find men pursuing the world's mysteries with irreverent feet, bent on gain or fame, with little thought of the good of men or the praise of God. The world of scholarship has not outgrown the need to sit at Jesus' feet and learn the lessons of unselfish devotion to truth, of humility, and of love. Jesus gave no teaching on the economic

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\* Much of the rest of this section was suggested by Schmidt, *The Prophet of Nazareth*, Chapter XIV.

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laws of wealth and its accumulation; but he does teach the truth which the modern world so sorely needs to know,—that it does not pay to sacrifice one's higher self to gain even the whole wealth of the world. Jesus does not prescribe one form of government as best for men; but he does teach by precept and example that governments must exist for the common good, and that those who rule must serve. Jesus does not give rules for fixing the prices men may charge for the output of the factories; but he does assert the supreme worth of the men, women and children who tend the machines. He wrote no treatise, to be sure, on the construction of ships or the operation of a wireless telegraph; but he does tell us what we still need to be taught, that the ship when built must go on errands of mercy, not of de-

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struction; that the message sent by wireless must be a message of justice and love, not one of hate or war. With all modern discoveries and achievements in medicine and surgery,—splendid and beneficent as they are,—men have discovered no surgery for a broken heart, no balm for a sin-sick soul, no antidote for sensuality's creeping death other than those taught by the great soul-physician of Nazareth. And while human nature remains what it is and has been since recorded history began, as long as men love and hate, sin and repent, and feel after God, so long will the teaching of Jesus be needed to show them that God is not far from any and to point out the way to Him. As long as God and the soul endure as they are, so long will Jesus remain the satisfier of the soul's needs, the final spiritual teacher of the world.

## CHAPTER XI.

### *THE HEIGHT OF THE PEDESTAL.*

Let us now turn from the teaching to the personality of Jesus. Christianity has always made him rather than his teaching alone central in its thought. What value must we attach to his personality as a force in history? Is his teaching incidental to his character or an essential expression of it? How shall we account for him as a figure and force in history?

In order to get a true estimate of his personal power, it is needful to distinguish between it and the advantage given him by the historical set-

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ting of his life. Sometimes in approaching a city or park one catches a glimpse of a statue overtopping the trees or houses. Often it is impossible to tell how tall the figure really is until one can see the pedestal on which it stands; for the apparent height may be due in reality to the height of the pedestal. So in determining the actual greatness of an historic character one must know first of all how much of his apparent greatness and power are due to his environment and other favoring circumstances. Attention has already been called to the relative insignificance of the country of Jesus. Judea was lacking in nearly all those resources which enable a people to play an influential part in history. A little backbone of limestone mountains stretching between a harborless coast and an

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impassable desert, without great rivers, without population sufficient to form a conquering army, without mineral or agricultural resources, its capital a mere mountain fortress "on the road to nowhere," it had little chance to furnish one of its citizens with resources, either military, political, or economic, with which to influence the world.\* Had Alexander been born in Abyssinia, away from Greek culture and Philip's phalanx, what likelihood is there that he would be called great? If Napoleon had been a citizen of some petty native province of India at the foot of the Himalayas on the far frontier of the British Empire, how much chance would he have had to play the part he did or any great part in the history of civilization? Yet in such a despised

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\* See G. A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*.

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province on the far frontier of the Roman Empire Jesus was born. What he accomplished was achieved without any of the usual aids to power. He had neither wealth, learning, political organization, nor army with which to impress the world. In outward significance his life was like the mustard seed of his own parable. An obscure peasant of Galilee,—regarded as provincial even by his own nation,—he taught a few years, chiefly in the outlying districts of Palestine; gathered a few fisher-folk about him, who dreamed he was the Messiah that so persistently haunted the hopes of this strange people; aroused a transient interest among the Jews by his strange teaching and reputed cures; incurred the hate and fear of the rulers and leaders by his opposition to the conventional religion and by his sporadic

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popularity, and was put to death in disgraceful fashion by the connivance of Jewish and Roman authorities. If such a one made any impression on the world, it was by the sheer force of his personality and by the weight of his teaching.

There is one scene in his life that makes his independence of circumstances stand out with peculiar force. It was after the multitudes had turned away from him because he refused to be forced into a Messianic revolution just after the feeding of the five thousand near Capernaum. He had retired to the neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi with his twelve disciples, tho still uncertain of their loyalty. Here he finally dared ask them whom they believed him to be; and there Peter, for them all, confessed they still held him to be the Messiah, the Son of the Living

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God. Hard by where this confession was made, stood the marble temple in honor of Augustus which Herod Philip had erected to his imperial patron.\* Well might the provincials of the empire worship the *numen* of the emperor, for he seemed to them greater than their old national deities had been thought to be. He had the gifts of peace and justice and prosperity, the power of life and death in his hands. Which of these think you as you watch the scene, is the greater, the more divine: Augustus, the founder of the world-wide empire, with all power in his hands and all things in his gift, the incarnation of the world's ideal of peace, order, and law, whom the provincials worship in the marble temple as the greatest manifestation they know of divine power? Or Jesus of Naz-

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\*G. A. Smith, Hist. Geography of the Holy Land.

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reth, without power of office or place, fleeing from the indifference and hostility of his own people, alone except for the little band of unlettered Galileans who still think him the Messiah of God? Which will be most potent five centuries afterward, the empire of Caesar or the kingdom of Jesus? Certainly there is no promise in the outward circumstances of that scene that Jesus will supplant Caesar on the world's throne. Yet you know, student of history, that when three centuries had passed, centuries of struggle even unto blood between the followers of the Christ and the soldiers of Caesar, Constantine sat upon the imperial throne with the labarum over him, and that he was placed there by the followers of Jesus. And when five centuries had passed the bishop of Rome exercised in the name of Jesus, the authority

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of the Caesars after their dominion had perished. What was there in Jesus that, tho dead, he should thus rule the world on the ruins of Caesar's throne! Whatever it was that gave him such power, it was not the pedestal on which he stood.

## CHAPTER XII.

### *THE MEASURE OF A MAN.*

Next in our endeavor to get a true estimate of Jesus' personality, let us apply to him the measure of a man. When looking at a photograph of an ancient statue, it is difficult to get a correct idea of its size unless one knows the scale and perspective of the picture. It is common in photographing such an object to have a man stand beside it to give a standard of size. Likewise it is hard to get a true scale of measurement for characters of history, because they may be magnified or dwarfed by distance, contemporary characters, or by the

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imagination of succeeding ages. Some men loom large in history for lack of great men near them to reveal their real insignificance. Let us measure the personality of Jesus by placing alongside him two men who were his contemporaries; and, to be absolutely fair, let us take two men who were spiritual giants, of his own nation, and standing one on each side of him in the order of their historical appearance.

There is first John the Baptist, who, Jesus himself said, was the greatest of all the prophets; nay even, the greatest of the sons of women up to his own time. John came to a people long without the voice of prophecy, to an age religiously proud and self-satisfied. Yet he stirred the pulses of that crystallized age as Jewry has not been stirred for centuries, and convinced the self-right-

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eous people, confident of their Abrahamic blood, that they must repent of their sins or they would never see the kingdom of God. He brought the masses of the Jews out to the Jordan to his baptism of repentance, and even smoked out the complacent Pharisees with his predictions of the fires of judgment, until that "brood of vipers" was ready to flee from the imminent Messianic wrath. The leaders paid him the highest tribute by asking him whether he were not himself the Messiah. He rebuked Herod the tetrarch of Galilee for his adulterous marriage with Herodias, and made him tremble for his throne, fearful lest John should absolve the people from their allegiance. Herod did not feel himself secure until John was in prison, and the ambitious Herodias could not rest until he was

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dead. His influence was so lasting that twenty-five years after his death there were disciples of John in Ephesus who had not heard of Jesus; and at the end of the first Christian century the writer of the Fourth Gospel found it necessary to deny that John was the Messiah. Yet this stern convicter of hearts acknowledged it more fitting that Jesus should baptize him than that he should baptize Jesus, claimed to be unworthy to bear Jesus' sandals, and turned his own disciples to him as the expected Messiah. The influence of Jesus so speedily assimilated John's work and eclipsed him that the world has never realized how great the Baptist was.

On the other side of Jesus is the intense and commanding personality of Saul of Tarsus; a born leader of men, everywhere dividing them into

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those that followed him with intense loyalty and those who feared him with intense hate. He was too great to remain a consistent Pharisee. He could not look on while men were undermining the religion that to him was the only hope of eternal life and say with the "*laissez-faire*" spirit of his master Gamaliel, "If this be of God, we do not want to be found opposing it, and if it be of men it will come to naught anyhow, so that we need not bother about it." He held the clothes of the men who stoned Stephen and plunged at once into a persecution of extermination against Christianity. He was great enough to change his beliefs at the call of truth, and showed in his Christian apostleship the same dauntless zeal that he had shown in his Pharisaism. He freed the gospel from its Jewish swaddling-clothes

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and proclaimed it in its freedom and universality. He completely overshadowed the original twelve apostles. He put the impress of his experience and thinking so firmly upon Christian theology that it has been predominantly Pauline to this day. Handicapped by being a despised Jew, and by the doctrine of a crucified Messiah, "to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness," he went forth to win the Roman world. It was not among the credulous and unlearned rural populations, and in the frontier provinces, that he sought his fields, but in the very centers of Graeco-Roman civilization. He worked a year in Antioch, three years in Ephesus, two years in Corinth, and two in Rome; and by the force of his personality he so planted his gospel in these capitals that the power of the

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Caesars thru two centuries of persecution could not root it up.

Yet this giant, when he met with the spirit of Jesus, instantly put himself at his service and asked for orders. Thereafter the superlative Pharisee called himself the chief of sinners, and was proud to sign himself the slave of Jesus. For him he abandoned all that had been his pride and hope, his consuming passion being henceforth to attain to the goal of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus. Thus it is that Jesus appears beside his greatest contemporaries, and like some sun draws the mightiest of them from their courses to revolve as satellites about him.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### *THE NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME.*

Jesus' influence over men constitutes another measure of his greatness. Just as astronomers seek to determine the magnitude of some comet by noting its pull upon the planets and their satellites, so we may get some idea of the power of Jesus as we observe his influence on those with whom he came in contact. We have already seen his influence on John the Baptist and on Paul. We have also seen how the Twelve clung to the belief that he was the Messiah, when appearances were all to the con-

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trary; even tho he had failed to do what they expected of the Messiah; altho his own nation had rejected him; and altho he had told them his career was to end in a disgraceful death which was to their minds no part of the Messiah's destiny. They kept the belief because they could account for his personal power and character on no other supposition than that he was the Messiah. And we note this same tendency in all who came to know Jesus intimately: to feel that nothing short of their greatest word could adequately describe him. To that section of the Jews which shared the Messianic hope, there was no greater word than Messiah, which might be applied to anyone in the likeness of man. But when any of these came to know Jesus they persisted in calling him the Christ even tho at the cost of suffer-

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ing and death. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, writing to Jews of Sadducean tendencies, to whom the temple cultus with its priesthood was greater than the Messianic hope, describes Jesus by the greatest word they know: Jesus is the great High Priest, and to make it superlative, "the high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." When the writer of the Fourth Gospel wishes to describe Jesus to men of Hellenistic mind, who have speculated of possible divine "words" that should reveal the unknown deity, he calls Jesus the "Word" who declares in human flesh the unseen God. When the Nicene fathers undertook to formulate in a phrase what they felt Jesus to be, they knew no name that was adequate, except "the name that is above every name," and so wrote in their creed that he was "very

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God of very God." Thus we gather from the names they gave him how great was the impression Jesus made on the first generations of his followers.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *PITTED AGAINST THE RABBIS.*

Some impression of the intellectual power of Jesus has been gained from the consideration of the truth and originality of his teaching. Another measure of it is found in the scenes of Tuesday of Passion Week, when he measured wits with the trained minds of the Rabbis. The intellectual power which he displayed was due mainly to his native ability, since he had not the advantage of extensive study in the schools. The Jewish leaders had decided to arrest Jesus, but found an obstacle in the

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crowds that had saluted him as Messiah during the Triumphal Entry, and which still hung upon his words and were loyal to his person. Till these were alienated from him, to arrest him meant to provoke a riot which would bring down Pilate's legions upon them and mar the feast of the passover with a bloody massacre. So the leaders undertook to discredit Jesus before the crowds, so that the latter would turn away from him and leave them free to dispose of him as they listed. It seemed an easy matter to make this simple-minded provincial say some foolish, blasphemous, or seditious thing. So the contest of wits between Jesus and the best trained minds of Judaism, sharpened by malice, began and continued thruout the day.

First, they asked him for his authority to teach. It was customary

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for men, who were deemed competent, to be publicly authorized as rabbis. They expected Jesus to confess in confusion that he had never been ordained as a rabbi, and then they would be able to shame the crowds for attaching importance to the mouthings of an unlettered upstart. To their demand for his authority, Jesus replied with a counter-question: Was John the Baptist a prophet of God or no? Now this was not a mere subterfuge. Had they been sincere, it would have put them on the way to the truth about him. But they were not sincere, and as they thought it over, they found it was not Jesus but themselves who were embarrassed by their question. If they should answer that John was a true prophet, then Jesus would remind them that John had called him the Messiah. If on the

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other hand, they said, what they really believed, that John was not a true prophet, they would discredit themselves with the multitude, for the masses firmly believed that John was sent of God. The result was that these professed oracles and religious leaders of God's chosen people publicly professed that they could not tell whether or no a man like the Baptist spoke by the Spirit of God.

Then the Pharisees and Herodians came together. They asked Jesus whether it was right to pay tribute to Caesar. If he should answer that it was lawful to pay the tribute, the crowd of Galilean zealots, whose loyalty to Jesus stood in the way of the leaders' purpose, would turn against him; for it was the fundamental tenet in the zealot platform, that the Jews had no king but

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Jehovah and were cowards if after God they paid tribute to any man. If, on the other hand, Jesus should say it was wrong to pay the tribute, the Herodians would report to Pilate that the Galilean prophet was stirring up sedition, and Pilate would know how to deal effectually with treason against Caesar. It was a dangerous dilemma, and on one horn or the other of it they felt sure Jesus would be caught. In reply he asked them to show him the tribute money, and one of them drew from the bosom of his tunic the *denarius* bearing the name and image of Tiberius. Now the fact that these Pharisees had Caesar's money in their pockets, showed that they had assumed obligations to Caesar and betrayed their hypocrisy. Pretending to have scruples against acknowledging the rights of the Gentile government, they

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nevertheless availed themselves of it whenever it served their selfish interests to do so. They traded with Caesar's money, took advantage of the Roman peace to ply their trades in security, and appealed to the Roman government against injustice on the part of even their own countrymen. "Therefore," said Jesus, "since you have thus put yourselves under obligations to Caesar, render to him what is due him in return, and do not at the same time forget to pay what you owe to God for his benefits to you." And thus Jesus escaped the snare by making a clear and simple distinction as to men's duties.

Next came the Sadducees and sought to show how simple-minded Jesus was for believing in the resurrection. They cited a case, such as might easily arise under the Pentateuchal laws, of seven men who had

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had the same wife in succession, and asked him whose wife she would be in the resurrection. Now the chief quality of the trained mind is its ability to make fine distinctions. The untrained usually think in masses and extremes. To a child, you must be bad if you are not good; the thing that is not white must be black. It is an evidence of culture when men begin to recognize the infinite gradation of grays thru which white shades into black, and to know the varying degrees of goodness and badness that may be mixed in the same character. The difficulty of the Sadducees' question lay in the ridiculousness of a certain conception of the resurrection life, which seemed to make belief in any kind of resurrection altogether untenable. But Jesus makes the distinction, such as is always harder to make in controversy than when in a

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judicial frame of mind, between the false assumption and the actual truth. They assumed that the resurrection is a simple resumption of the relations and conditions of this life. This, Jesus tells them, is a mistake. In the future life all will be spiritual; and marriage, which is an institution for replenishing a mortal race, will be no longer needed, "for neither can they die any more." But that there is a real resurrection life Jesus proves to these Sadducees from the only part of the Old Testament which they admit as authoritative,—the Pentateuch. He meets them on their own ground and shows them that the religious relation to God involves continued life, since "God is not the God of dead men but of living, for all live unto Him."

After the discomfiture of the Sadducees, one of the scribes came, ask-

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ing which was the greatest commandment of the law. The trap in the question lay in the fact that according to the Jewish view all commandments of the law were of equal importance. They thought God just as much concerned to have the sacrificial blood sprinkled on a certain side of the altar as that men should observe justice, mercy, and the love of God. For Jesus to designate one as greater than another would be like calling one book of the Bible more inspired than another. Jesus replied by quoting as the first commandment that passage from Deuteronomy with which the *Shema* began in the synagogue service. The Jews themselves had put it first in their study and recitation of the law in the synagogue, since it furnished the motive for the observance of the precepts of the law. Alongside this, as being

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like it, Jesus put a passage from Leviticus, which includes within its motive all precepts of social righteousness. The scribe “saved his face” by declaring courteously that Jesus had answered well.

After the scribe had retired no more questions were asked; but Jesus adopting their own methods turned upon his questioners. Assuming the Messianic character and Davidic authorship of Psalm 110, as all his hearers did without question, he asked how it was that David called the Messiah “Lord,” if he were his son. It was almost unthinkable for a Jewish father to call his son, “Lord.” This question they were unwilling or unable to answer, since it led to the conclusion that the Messiah was something more than a mere son of David after the flesh, more than merely a political successor.

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This day of conflict, begun by the leaders in order to discredit Jesus before the multitudes and “take him in his talk,” ended with the Rabbis baffled and silenced. Jesus had come off victorious in the dangerous play of words, and with terrific denunciations of their insincerity and spiritual incompetence, he swept them out of the temple and remained undisputed master of the situation. He was an intellectual giant.

## CHAPTER XV.

### *THE POISE OF HIS CHARACTER.*

The spiritual power of Jesus, which has always been perceived more fully than his intellectual power, is seen best in the poise of his character and in his ability to touch the consciences of men. The effectiveness of power is determined by its control and application. A powerful engine would soon knock itself to pieces without a governor. Great spiritual power cannot exist except in diffused and self-destructive forms unless accompanied by self-control and concentration. There is a repose

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in the characters of men that is due to the absence of personal force, but the poise of Jesus' character was due to his self-control. He was complete master of his powers so that he concentrated his energies effectively on the supreme purposes of his life.

We find this manifest first, in his physical endurance. It was not the indifference of those incapable of suffering, nor the stoicism of hardened natures, but that endurance of pain for higher ends which is the essence of all moral heroism. For evidence of Jesus' physical courage and endurance we turn inevitably to the scene on Golgotha. It is difficult for us to-day to imagine the sufferings inflicted by crucifixion. It was a Roman refinement of an Assyrian brutality. The victim was placed so that the agonies of the nail wounds would be freshened by every

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effort to relieve the tortures of an unendurable position, until at last the victim died of starvation or blood-poisoning. In addition to this Jesus had been scourged before the crucifixion and had borne the beam of his cross upon his lacerated back until he fainted under it. Yet thru the long hours upon the cross, his words were almost altogether about his mission or full of solicitude for those about him,—for the soldiers who crucified him, for the robber suffering at his side, and for his mother in her awful bereavement. Only once did a cry of physical pain escape him. Those who know of the torturing thirst that comes from loss of blood to soldiers left wounded on the battle-field, will not marvel as much at Jesus' cry "I thirst," as at the spirit that refused the stupefying drink of myrrh. We of this generation, who shrink so

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quickly from the post of the foreign missionary and from all other moral enterprizes that involve danger, discomfort, or pain; who take refuge so readily from pain in anesthetics and anodynes, can understand something of the moral power that enabled Jesus to suffer so in silence, "for the joy that was set before him." The Roman centurion who guarded the cross was accustomed to see men suffer and die; to see them endure stoically and die heroically; and yet the spirit with which Jesus bore his fate made the Roman exclaim "Surely this was a son of the gods!"

There is a yet greater test of a man's power over himself than the endurance of actual pain. In the excitement of battle or the passion of conflict men may face danger easily, tho they are unable to go in cold-blood to certain suffering. The

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bravest moment in John Bunyan's life was when, crouching in Bedford jail with the threat of the gallows over him, if he did not prove untrue to his calling, and fearing he might disgrace his Master by going to the gallows with white face and tottering knees, he still resolved, if need be, to leap boldly off the ladder with the noose about his neck, "Come heaven, come hell." Jesus' greatest courage was not that shown on Golgotha, but when alone in Gethsemane he faced the cross and still held true to his Father's will; or when a year before the fatal passover he foresaw the awful end, and yet kept on his way, or even when he set out for Jerusalem, knowing he was on his way to death. The twelve were brave men, as the world accounts bravery,—hardy fishermen who often braved the storms of the treacherous lake of

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Galilee. Their leader, single-handed, attacked a Roman cohort in the garden of Gethsemane. But Mark gives us this contrast between Jesus and them: "And they were on the way, going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus was going before them: and they were amazed; and they that followed were afraid."

A greater manifestation of Jesus' power is found in his self-restraint in regard to his ministry.\* He believed himself as the Messiah to be possessed of supernatural powers, but he refused of set purpose to employ his powers for personal advantage. He refused to attempt signs from heaven to ease the labor of his mission; or to work miracles to lift himself above the common lot; or to invoke as a means of escape from

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\* Robinson, *Studies in the Character of Christ*, Chapter I.

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suffering the angelic legions which he believed to be at his call in Gethsemane. The same self-restraint shows itself in connection with his work of healing. When he found great multitudes of ailing people; when he found the porches of Bethesda full of sick-folk, how naturally we expect him to heal them every one. But he resisted the impulse to heal either from love of glory, from weakly sentimentalism, or shortsighted sympathy. He felt the divineness of the natural order; knew the disciplinary value of pain; and reserved his power for the blessing of men in their highest and completest selves. He never healed except for the good of the afflicted,—the spiritual as well as the physical good.

Jesus shows a similar self-restraint in the patience and perseverance with which he pursued his purposes amid

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the course of events which he could only partially control. One of the most trying things for men possessed by noble enthusiasms is to have to work with intractable material; to have their plans thwarted by accident; and their purposes delayed equally by cunning malice and ignorant good-intent. Yet Jesus astonishes us by the equipoise of temper with which he pursues his goal; by the patience with which he awaits his opportunity; by the energy with which he avails himself of every opening, and by the skill with which he turns seeming obstacles to account. He refuses to be hastened until his hour has come. He accepts events as God's ordering. He goes aside for a day's rest, but finding hungry and needy multitudes, makes the day one of his busiest, as he feeds the thousands, soul and body. Opposi-

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tion drives him from one field only to send him to one more fertile. When the hostility of the Pharisees drives him from Judea, he devotes himself to the training of the twelve; and the treachery of Judas brings him to the triumphant sacrifice of his cross.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### *HIS POWER TO TOUCH THE CONSCIENCE.*

Jesus' spiritual power was not only sufficient to keep his own conscience clear, but to quicken the consciences of others. John the Baptist had preached repentance and had been wonderfully successful in piercing the armor of his people's self-complacency. But when Jesus began to preach the same message, he soon outstripped John in the numbers he brought to him confessing their sins. Those who have devoted themselves to the task of stirring the feeble moral consciousness of men into a

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realization of their sinfulness, know what a task it is. But there is a harder task; after men have been led to see themselves in the blaze of divine holiness, and so to know their sinfulness; after they have had their pride broken so that they are ready to confess their weaknesses and sins, then to lift them up in hope and make them believe it is still possible for them to become victorious over sin, and live lives honorable in the sight of men and useful in the service of God,—this is the harder task. Yet this Jesus was strong to do. He made Peter cry out, “Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord”; but he led Peter to forsake all and follow him. Jesus’ look broke Peter’s heart and sent him out of Caiaphas’ palace to weep bitterly; but it also brought him back to Jesus by the Lake of Tiberias with his pro-

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fession of humble loyalty: "Thou knowest that I love thee." He touched the conscience of the sinful woman so that it burned with her shame; but she came to weep in his presence, and went from him into peace and hope, to sin no more. He had the power to call out the highest in men. His seemingly impossible dreams created a new type of spiritual, altruistic character. He demanded of men that they be perfect as God is perfect; that they forgive one another as God forgives the penitent; that they love one another as he loved them; and that they take up the cross of utter self-abnegation and follow him. No other character in history has set before men, in example and precept, so high an ideal of duty; and no other has opened to men such sluices of enabling power. From him there

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has flowed thru the centuries a steadily widening stream of personal, social, and civic righteousness; because weak, erring, common men and women in response to his demands have come to believe in themselves; because his faith in them has made them worthy of his trust. No other personage has been able to arouse such an unselfish enthusiasm for humanity. Men admire the work of other geniuses, but they do not risk their lives to acquaint savages and aliens with the tragedies of Shakespeare or the philosophy of Plato. Jesus has been able so to enlist the loyalty of men, that the lives of missionaries and reformers and martyrs have been the seed of his church, and so to direct it, that his religion is the religion of humanity.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### *THE COSMIC MEANING OF HIS CHARACTER.*

Thus far we have been occupied with the effort to ascertain the historical greatness of Jesus. We must now try to find an explanation of his character and power adequate to account for his knowledge of truth, the perfection of his character, and the potency of his personal influence. The explanation of history carries us a little way, but stops short of the goal of our quest. History contributes to our understanding of him, when it points us to the unique religious capacity and spiritual

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passion of the Hebrew race; to the rich heritage of the Old Testament literature and institutions that was his; to the pure and tenacious family life of the Jews, which gave content to his teaching; and to the Messianic hope which gave at once the suggestion of his mission and the interpretative form to his message. It goes further when it calls attention to the pious group of men and women like Mary and Elizabeth, Zachariah and Simeon, from which he sprang; and to the exceptional purity of his character and spirituality of his religious experiences. But all these leave us unsatisfied, and we must turn from history to philosophy, not for the solution of all mysteries, but for an estimate of his cosmic significance; for such a correlation of Jesus of Nazareth with the thought-world in which we live, as to give the mind

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a resting-place and bring religious belief into harmony with experience.

It is one of the fundamental assumptions of all our thinking that the effect must be included in the cause; that what is evolved must first be involved; or, to put it in the language of common-sense, that something cannot be got out of nothing. Whether this conviction be true absolutely, the philosophers may at times dispute, but we cannot think without making such an assumption. When we find a white-petalled water-lily on the surface of a pond, we may trace its stem down till its roots disappear in the black ooze at the bottom. Now no dexterity of logic can convince us that a white lily can come out of black mud, unless the whiteness of the lily was potentially there to begin with; we insist that the whiteness was there in the seed or in

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some of the elements out of which it grew, before the whiteness could appear in the flower. Sometime since, application was made for a patent on a process for changing certain ores of antimony into gold. The Patent Office, fearing to become in some degree party to a fraud, sent the formula to the mint to be tried. The answer from the mint was that, if the ores in question were treated by the process described, a small quantity of gold would be obtained, because the ores contained a small percentage of gold. No way is known as yet to get gold in the result, unless it be present in the material used. It was this same line of reasoning that led a prominent English philosopher to say that by no known alchemy can we get golden conduct out of leaden motives. By the same reasoning, whatever appears in the course of the

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world's evolution must be already present in the creative evolving causes. If personal intelligence, sinlessness, and love appear in the cosmic process, it means they belong first of all to the Creating Cause of the universe. By no alchemy can Jesus of Nazareth come out of a materialistic or godless universe.

“A fire-mist and a planet,  
A crystal and a cell;  
A jelly-fish and a saurian,  
And the caves where the cave-men  
dwell:—  
Then a sense of law and beauty,  
And a face turned from the  
sod;—  
Some call it evolution,  
And others call it God.”

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *THE SECRET OF HIS POWER.*

The cosmic significance of Jesus, then, lies in what he visibly makes known of the Personal Spirit who lies back of the cosmic process. It is also in his relation to the spiritual forces of the world that the secret of his power is to be sought. On a clear summer day one sometimes sees a fleecy cloud not bigger than a hand stand out for a moment from the blue and then vanish into it again.\* The evanescent cloud is significant only because it reveals the facts and forces

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\* Brierly, *Ourselves and the Universe*, page 300.

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that produced it; because it is a visible indication of the vast flood of waters that hangs otherwise invisible in the air above us; because it shows that the air has reached the point of saturation and is ready to begin the precipitation of cloud or rain. One may see at night upon the city streets a glowing light hanging from a couple of dark wires. Somewhere, unseen by the man on the street, masses of coal are dazzling white in the furnaces and imprisoned steam snarls and hisses in the boilers; but this power of coal and steam flows silent and unseen in the black wires, and only the light reveals its presence. One might easily think the light could be extinguished with the hand, but if he should undertake it he would encounter the vast force which the feeble manifestation of it in the light had not prepared him to expect.

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So the secret of Jesus' power lies in the spiritual forces that came to visible manifestation in him. His outward life gave no indication of the power behind him. When most of his contemporaries saw him, there was "no beauty that they should desire him," no pomp of power that they should fear him. When he became inconvenient to their purposes, they thought it easy to silence him. But his persistent influence and growing power proved a puzzle to Pharisee and Sadducee alike. They put him to death, but his death seemed but to increase his influence. Saul of Tarsus undertook to quench Jesus' movement, thinking it would be easy to destroy the despised sect, and then Saul received the spiritual shock that utterly transformed him. The only explanation of what happened to him, he could ever give, was to say

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that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.” Jesus’ most intimate disciples all felt and said, in one way or another, the same thing; that they came nearest God and felt His uplifting power most fully when they were with Jesus; that to see him was to see the Father; to know him was eternal life. We of the twentieth century may not care to use the words of the first, but in some terms, any adequate explanation of Jesus must be virtually the explanation of his first interpreters; that in him was manifest in terms of human life, the holiness, love, and personal power of the Universal Character we call God; that thru him the spiritual power of God most effectually gripped human history; that to know him in spiritual fellowship is to be placed in the circuit of the world’s redemptive forces; is to be driven by the highest motives

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toward man's highest ideals; is to have life raised to its highest power in coördination with the Infinite Father.









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